RELIGION OF THE SIKHS

KHUSHWANT SINGH

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(Guru Nanak Lectures delivered at the University of Madras)

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Introduction by His Excellency

SARDAR UJJAL SINGH

Governor of Madras

FOREWORD

The 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak is to be celebrated in the year 1969 throughout the world. A registered society under the name of Guru Nanak Foundation was established in Delhi to organise these celebrations, with Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the then President of India, as Chief Patron, His Highness Maharaja of Patiala, as President, and Sardar Hukam Singh, now Governor of Rajasthan, and myself as Vice-Presidents.

Guru Nanak was a messenger of peace and love. He received enlightenment directly from God. He had no teacher or Guru in the traditional sense although he is reported to have learnt Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. To quote his own words—

APRAMPAR PARBRAHM PARMESHAR
NANAK GUR MILYA SOI JEEO

He was a born prophet and even from his very childhood he is believed to have wielded supernatural powers and exhibited unusual behaviour. With his enormous spiritual dimensions, he established direct communion with God and obtained enlightenment. He described his mystic experience following his physical disappearance from Sultanpur where he was employed as a store-keeper and re-appearance in the following words:

DHADDI SACHAE MAHAL KHASAM BULAYA,
SACHI SIFT SALAHAE KAPRA PAYA,
SACHA AMRIT NAM BHOJAN PAYA.

> "I, the bard of the Lord, was summoned to the Court of the True and the Supreme Master. He graced me by granting me the robe of honour and the praise of the True Name and fed me with the nectar of the Great Truth."

The Guru travelled extensively, mostly on foot, to convey his inspired message—from Mecca, Medina and Baghdad in the West, to Dacca and Kamrup (Assam) in the East, from Kashmir and Tibet in the North to Kanyakumari and Ceylon in the South. This was a marvellous feat—almost a miracle—in those times when there was hardly any quick means of transport or travelling facility. The object of his travels was to spread his message of Oneness of God, brotherhood of man and of love and tolerance. He seldom entered into an argument or debate and invariably, either by his hymns sung in sweet melody or by a dramatic act, he won the hearts of the people.

The Guru laid stress on the fundamental truth in all religions and seldom asked anyone to give up his own faith. He asked the Muslims to be true Muslims and the Hindus to be true Hindus. He considered all human beings as the offspring of One God and therefore brothers.

EK PITA EKAS KE HAM BARAK TUN MERA GUR HĀI

No one was high or low. They were all equal. He himself was very humble and said that humility was the essence of goodness.

MITHAT NEEVIN NANKA GUNN CHANGAIAN TAT.

He did not believe in caste system or untouchability. By good action alone, he said, can any one claim to be of high caste and not by the exigency of birth. He did not believe in renunciation but laid stress on charity and detachment while making an honest living by hard endeavour and active work.

SĀ JĀT SĀ PAT HAI JEHE KARAM KAMĀI

GHAL KHAI KICHH HATHON THEI,
NANAK RAHO PACHHANAEH SAI.

Guru Nanak was therefore not only a great spiritual leader but also a crusader against social evils and divisive forces in the country.

As part of the celebrations of the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, at the instance of the University Grants Commission, Guru Nanak Chairs have been instituted in some Universities. In December 1967, the Syndicate of the University of Madras resolved that a Chair called "Guru Nanak Chair' be established for comparative religion/philosophy with particular reference to Guru Nanak's philosophical thoughts and teachings. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras invited Sardar Khushwant Singh to give the first series of lectures in 1968 under the auspices of the Guru Nanak Chair in the University.

Sardar Khushwant Singh is a renowned author of many books on Sikh religion and history and is a Visiting Professor with the Universities of Princeton and Swarthmore. He gave three lectures on the 11th, 12th and 13th July 1968, on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak with a glimpse of the life and work of other Gurus.

Sardar Khushwant Singh has emphasized in his lectures that Guru Nanak's message was a synthesis of Vedanta and the Upanishads of the Hindu thought with Islamic thought of oneness of God. The Guru may have studied the Upanishads and the Vedas but it was his own innate genius which inspired him to proclaim from the very beginning a gist of his message which he later on unfolded in his compositions and hymns.

In his first lecture, Sardar Khushwant Singh traced the origin and development of the Bhakti movement and the mingling of the

Bhakti and Sufi movements in the teachings of Guru Nanak. In his second lecture, he discussed the religious philosophy of the Guru and the spiritual experience which moulded his thought and mentioned the points which are common between Vedantic Hinduism and the philosophy of Guru Nanak and also important common items of religious beliefs contained in Islam and in Guru Nanak's philosophy. He pinpointed the fundamental teachings of Guru Nanak and showed how the great Guru tried to bring closer the two communities, the Hindu and the Muslim. In his third lecture, Sardar Khushwant Singh traced the development of the Sikh faith under the fostering care of the nine Gurus and dealt at length with the course of conversion of the Sikh faith to the militant Khalsa brotherhood.

The subject-matter was handled by Sardar Khushwant Singh in a masterly way and what is particularly striking about these lectures is the objective point of view which he brought forth in presenting facts and tenets of Sikh religion and philosophy. The University of Madras have come forward to have them printed for reaching the wider public. I hope the readers will appreciate the lectures in the same way as those who actually listened to them at the University Hall.

UJJAL SINGH,
Governor of Madras &
Chancellor, University of Madras.

UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS

GURU NANAK LECTURES—I

Spiritual Inheritance and the Life of Guru Nanak

Your Excellency, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel extremely honoured at having been invited to deliver these series of extension lectures on Sikh religion. I feel this honour all the more since my knowledge of the subject is far from exhaustive and whatever I have said or published on Sikh religion has been critically received by theologians of my community. To add to these two shortcomings is a third and even more serious one: a subject like religion should not only be studied through books but also become a way of life and be enriched by experience. Although I have spent some years in the study of the faith into which I was born, I have not lived the life of an orthodox Sikh. My approach remains essentially that of a seeker with an open mind towards all religions without any pre-conceived commitment to any. That is my only excuse to have put in print what I have written and to accept invitations to speak to audiences like the one I face today. I say all this at the very outset as I feel that none of you should labour under the delusion that what I say has the authority either of serious scholarship or of an emotional involvement or the approval of contemporary Sikh theologians. It has not. What I will put across is a very personal viewpoint and not a generally accepted version of the religion of the Sikhs.

I would, however, like to state that although there will be many who will question your choice of speaker for your extension lectures, there will be none who will have anything but praise for your choice of the subject. It is significant that yours should be the first University in India to honour the memory of Guru Nanak, whose 500th birth anniversary we will celebrate next year. That this has not occurred to any one of the many academic institutions of the Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi or Uttar Pradesh where most of the Guru's followers live today, but to the Tamilians has perhaps a historical justification. It was in Tamilnad that the Bhakti movement of which Guru Nanak became the chief exponent in the Punjab first started. It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that the renaissance of that Bhakti movement should also originate in Tamilnad. Let us hope that history repeats itself and once again it will be you, the Tamilians, who will re-light the torch of true religion — a religion which inculcates belief not only in the one God but also in mankind: in mankind

without distinction of race or caste, colour or creed; a religion which exhorts people not only to worship but also to work; a religion which is not restricted to ascetics who torture their bodies in the seclusion of forests and caves but one that can be practised by common men living and earning their livelihood in cities, towns and villages; a religion which uses as its vehicle not only the stern commandment or dry logic comprehensible to the learned few but also uses music and song understood and enjoyed by all. Such was the religion preached and practised by the Alwar and Adiyar saints of Tamilnad. Such also was the religion preached and practised by Guru Nanak. This religion was truly Indian. This is the religion that India needs today. May you be the people who will once again show your country the way.

Ladies and gentlemen, in this series of three lectures that I have been invited to deliver I will endeavour to inform you of the salient features of the Sikh faith.

A Sikh, as you probably know, has been defined by legislative enactment as one who believes in the ten gurus and the **Granth Sahib.** The Sikhs themselves believe that the spirit of the founder, Guru Nanak, passed into his successors 'as one lamp lights another' and is today embodied in their scripture, the **Granth Sahib**. I feel therefore that I must tell you not only about the life and teaching of Nanak but also very briefly of how his teaching developed after him. I have therefore divided the three lectures as follows: in the first one today, I will give you an account of the background to the birth of Sikhism and the life of the founder; in the second tomorrow I will deal the salient points of Nanak's religious philosophy; and in the third and last I will discuss the development of Sikhism under remaining nine gurus.

Before I come to my real subject I would like to say a few words on the need to study the Sikhs and their religion.

Not much is known about the Sikhs or their religion. Sikhs only number 8 out of India's population of 500 millions. Christians who number 12 million and Muslims who number over 50 million are in the reckoning of heads deserving of greater notice. Besides, Sikhs are usually considered a protestant and militant subsect of the Hindus and so denied the attention they deserve. I do not exaggerate when I say that despite its small size, the Sikh community is today politically, economically, strategically and militarily more important than its under 2 per cent of the proportion of the population would warrant. It is not for nothing that a Sikh refers to himself as **sava lakh** — equal to a hundred and twentyfive thousand or a **fauj** — an army. But since my function here is not to deal with the Sikhs as a social entity but to tell you something about their religion, I will restrict my opening remarks as to why Sikhism deserves more attention of not only

theologians and scholars of comparative religion but of all Indologists than it has in the past.

There are five good reasons for recommending its study. In the first place, of all the major religions of presest-day India, Sikhism is the only one which is purely and entirely Indian by birth and development. This may sound an outrageous assertion but it is substantially correct. **Hinduism** though developed in India was brought along with the Sanskrit language by the Aryans from Central Asia or whatever region which was their original home. **Islam** likewise originated in Arabia and came to India with Muslim traders and conquerors. The same applies to **Christianity** and **Zoroastrianism. Buddhism** which was born in India was ousted from the land within a few centuries of its birth and few Buddhists remain in the country today. The resurgence of neo-Buddhism in recent years is as yet more a sociological than a religious phenomenon. **Jainism**, which was and is Indian, has so completely merged within the Hindu fold as not to be distinguishable from it. Eight million Sikhs represent the **only** major community of India who practise a faith which is purely and entirely of Indian origin. I do not say this to disparage other religions in any way but just to draw your attention to the fact that if you wish to study a religion which is 100 per cent Indian — which has drawn its sustenance entirely from Indian sources be it Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism or Indian Islam, you have no choice but to study Sikhism.

The second reason is that Sikhism is perhaps the **only** religion in the world which could claim to be not only eclectic but also **completely** non-denominational. The sacred scripture of the Sikhs the **Adi Granth**, contains not only the writings of the Sikh Gurus but also those of Hindu and Muslim saint-poets of all castes ranging from Brahmins to the untouchables from different parts of northern India. And the **Adi Granth** is to every Sikh the living embodiment of all his ten Gurus and the word of God spoken through them.

Thirdly the Sikh faith is a synthesis of the two major religions of India — Hinduism and Islam. You well know that both these religions underwent considerable change after their impact on each other. Movements towards a **Rapproachment** were started from either end and the two blended in Sikhism which again, is the only living faith which could be described as both Muslim and Hindu with each portion representing Hinduism and Islam in their Indian maturity. The Sikh gurus did not leave the blending to chance but clother it with a personality distinct from either of its two constituents. Sikhism is like the **sangam** where the two streams of Hinduism and Islam mingle to become a mighty river.

The fourth reason for recommending the study of Sikhism may appear more sociological than religious. The Sikhs are a unique

example of a community which within a couple of centuries of its birth developed a faith, outlook, a way of life — and according to some even physical features, so distinct from the two communities, the Hindus and the Muslims out of whom they were born, as to achieve the semblance of separate nationhood. And having become a nation became the spearhead of a nationalist movement which gathered both the parent communities within its fold, liberated its homeland from foreign oppression, turned the tide of invasion back into the homes of its traditional conquerors and extended the Punjab's frontiers to Tibet, Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Sindh. The movement reached its climax under the Sikh ruler, Maharajah Ranjit Singh, and having run its course collapsed within ten years of his death. This aspect of the story of the Sikhs would at first sight seem purely political and not connected with their religion. That is not so. In the process of development, the last of the Sikh gurus, Gobind Singh invested his following with external symbols, chiefly unshorn hair and beard, which became an integral part of the Sikh way of life and the one factor distinguishing them from other communities, particularly the Hindus, from whom the vast majority were converted. Since the annexation of the Punjab by the British in 1849 A.D. the Sikh community has had to wage a relentless struggle for survival as a separate community. The tendency to abandon external forms — unshorn hair and beard — has grown amongst men of the younger generation resulting in the lapse back of an ever increasing number of Sikhs into the Hindu fold. If the pace of this lapsing back into Hinduism continues, we may witness the remarkable, and to most Sikhs of my way of thinking, a tragic phenomenon of a people losing its distinctiveness and of a living faith consigning itself to the cold catacombs of history. This is the fifth and final reason for recommending a sympathetic study of the Sikhs and their religion.

Sources of Information.

Let me add a few words of caution on the sources of information at our disposal. Sikh religion consists, as I have already said, of the teachings of ten Sikh Gurus starting with the founder, Guru Nanak who was born in 1469 A.D. and ending with the last Guru Gobind Singh who died in 1708. The teachings of the first five Gurus were collected by the fifth Guru Arjun in the anthology called the **Adi** or the first **Granth** which he compiled in the year 1604 A.D. — to which only the hymns of the 9th Guru, Tegh Bahadur, were added a hundred years later. In short, although we do have authentic and first hand accounts of what the Gurus taught, we are not on as firm a ground on what they did. This applies particularly to the founder, Guru Nanak who spent many years of his life in travel. There is no contemporary record of his life nor an account by anyone who knew him personally. By the time the first so-called biography came to be written, Nanak

had been dead for 80 years and his name had become a legend. When facts were wanting, his biographers supplemented them with their own imagination. Incidents were created to give appropriate settings to his hymns and frequently anecdotes about other saints were attached to him. The authors of **Janam-Sakhis** or life stories of Guru Nanak borrowed liberally from the life of Prophet Mahomed, the Sufis and particularly from the life of Bhakta Kabir. I shall, therefore, deal very briefly with the life of Guru Nanak and refer only to incidents for which there is some measure of authenticity. What I say about the teachings of the Sikh gurus will therefore be largely confined to what they wrote (of which there is no manner of doubt) rather than what they did (which is not free from doubt).

The Background

All religions inherit a spiritual tradition which they remould to suit the circumstances of the time. The spiritual tradition inherited by the Sikh faith was, as I have said before, from two sources, the Islamic and the Hindu. In order to understand Sikh religion, we must first understand these two traditions and the political conditions at the time of Nanak. Let me first take the Hindu background.

(a) Hindu renaissance

Not long after the Aryans settled in India, the Hindu social system came to be dominated by the priestly order of the Brahmins who monopolised learning and privileges for themselves and reduced Hindu religion to a set of rituals and worship of idols. The first to revolt against Brahmanical Hinduism were Jaina Mahavira and Gautama the Buddha (5th century B.C.). Their followers swept Hinduism off its feet and for a thousand years or more the predominant faiths in India were Buddhism and Jainism. Hinduism was on the defensive working out ways and means to stem the tide which had practically inundated it. While the process was still going on, came the challenge of Islam.

(b) The Challenge of Islam

Commercial intercourse between Arabia and India had been going on from time immemorial. People living on the western coast of India stretching from the mouth of Indus, along the Gulf of Cambay and the Western Ghats right down to the southernmost tip of Cape Comorin were familiar with Arab sailors and merchants. From the year 636 A.D. onwards, settlements of Arab Muslims began to be established on the western coast, particularly in Malabar. The peaceful spread of Islam was suddenly checked when Muslim armies began to invade India. In 712 A.D. the seventeen year old Mohammed Bin Qasim overran Sindh. There was a lull after Qasim. The storm burst in

its full fury with the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazna (971-1030 A.D.) who swept across northern India and down to Gujarat annihilating all opposition and destroying Hindu temples wherever he went. Thereafter invasions from the north-west became a regular feature of life in northern India. Then Muslim began to be looked up as foreign invaders who had to be resisted. Conversions to Islam ceased for some time. Neither the succession of victories to Muslim arms nor the destruction of Hindu temples brought many Hindus into the fold of Islam. The battles of Islam were won not by the Muslim conquerors but by peaceful missionaries.

(c) **Hinduism's compromise with Islam. The Bhakti movement**

Let me return to Hinduism. Its renaissance in the south was led by the Alvar and Adiyar Saint poets of Tamilnad. It also found its champion in the person of Sankara (8th century A.D.) whose concern was not with Islam but with refuting the heresies of the Jains and the Buddhists. Sankara was the expounder of **Kevaladvaita** — pure Monism. His teaching can be summed up in three pithy statements : **Brahm Satyam, Jagan Mithya, Jivo Brahmaiva naparah** — Brahma or God is real, the world is unreal, the individual self is the only supreme self, no other. In Sankara's Monism there was no room for idols, nor the caste system nor for many of the practices of the Brahmins. He believed in the indefinable, omnipresent God. He wrote :

O Lord, pardon my three sins

I have in contemplation clothed in form Thee
who art formless

I have in praise described Thee who art indescribable

And in visiting temples I have ignored Thine omnipresence.

The torch lit by Sankara was taken up by Ramanuja (1016-1137 A.D). Ramanuja was a worshipper of Vishnu and advocated the path of **Bhakti** or devotion over knowledge or action as the way to salvation. He travelled extensively over northern India. Thus the movement found a protagonist in Ramananda who went a step further by accepting Muslims and Hindus of lower caste as his disciples. These disciples, notably the Muslim Kabir (1398-1518 A.D.) spread the message of **Bhakti** across the Indo-Gangetic plain into the Punjab. There was religious fervour all over the country and people who knew little or nothing of each other were saying the same sort of thing in their own languages in distant parts of India. There was Chaitanya in Bengal; Jnaneshwar, Namdev and later Tukaram in Maharashtra; Mira Bai in Rajasthan; Sadhana in Sindh. Very soon the influence of the Bhaktas was far greater than that of orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism.

The main points of the teaching of the Bhaktas were that God was one and the only reality; the rest was maya or illusion. The best way to serve God was by absolute submission to His will. The best way to find His will was through the guidance of a spiritual mentor, a guru. The best way to approach God was through meditation and through singing hymns of love and praise.

(d) **Islam's compromise with Hinduism — The Sufi Mystics.**

I have already mentioned that the peaceful spread of Islam was arrested by the conquest of northern India by Mussulman armies. This could not, nor did, succeed in converting them to the faith of their victors. But following in the train of the conquerors were men of peace who came with the specific purpose of spreading the gospel of Mohammed. In order to equip themselves for the task, these men studied other languages, cultures, religions and ways of life. They learnt about Christianity and Buddhism, about Greek and Hindu philosophy. These men were known as Sufis — **suf** meaning wool — they wore coarse woollen garments as a badge of poverty. Sufis emphasized those aspect of the Koran and the **Hadith** (traditions) which drew them closer to the people amongst whom they lived — for the cardinal principles of Sufi belief was **talif-i-kulub**, the stringing together of hearts. For a change Hindus who had been terrorised by the Muslim invaders, found some Muslims wanting to befriend them. Sufis promised the new converts equality and redeemed their promise by raising the lowest of the Hindu untouchables to the social level of the highest Arab. By the 15 century, there were a dozen orders of Sufis in northern India of which four, the Chishtiya, Qadiriya, Suhrawardiya and later the Naqshbandia were the most important. In the Punjab, the city of Multan and the town of Pak Pattan became the headquarters of the Sufi orders of which the Chishtiya became the most popular. The Islam of the Sufis was close to the Hinduism of the Bhaktas preached by the Muslim Kabir. They certainly believed in one God like all good Muslims, but there was a difference in the emphasis: instead of the aggressive **'La Ilaha Lillah'** 'there is no God but Allah' they quoted the Koran to say the same in different words 'wherever ye turn there is the face of Allah' (Incidentally, Nanak used almost the same words, "**Jit dhir dekhan, Tit dhir maujood**). They believed in the brotherhood of mankind, a brotherhood which embraced non-Muslims as well. They also believed in mystic union with God through ascetic discipline and chanting of litanies **dhikr** under the guidance of a religious teacher, **peer.** Through the influence of the Sufis, Islam and Hinduism drew closer to each other. All it needed was somebody to bridge the gap — not a very wide gap — between the temple and the mosque. That is the task Nanak took upon himself.

(e) Political conditions in the 15th century

A factor which had an important bearing on the teaching of Nanak was the political condition of the time in Northern India. Hindu kingdoms had been swept away by four hundred years of Muslim invasions. The earlier invaders took what they could and returned to their inhospitable countries. The later invaders came determined to make India their home and to subdue or come to terms with the people of India. First they tried subjection. They destroyed temples, converted the local people by force, tried to replace Sanskrit by Arabic and Persian. This policy was being spasmodically pursued by the Lodhi dynasty — whose own power had been crippled by the invasion of Timur in 1398. There was no law or order in the countryside. People lived in terror — each man felt the hand of his neighbour against him. Guru Nanak described the times in one compositions:—

> "The age," he said, "is like a knife. Kings are butchers.
> They dispense justice when their palms are filled......
> Wealth and beauty which afforded men pleasure have now become their bane......
> Decency and laws have vanished; falsehood stalks abroad......
> The vocation of priests is gone and the devil reads the marriage vows.
> Praises of murder are sung. Blood is shed in place of saffron"......

Nanak witnessed the result of the invasion of the Mughal, **Babar**, in 1526 and the destruction of the Lodhi dynasty. He wrote: "Then came Babar to Hindustan. Death disguised as a Mughal made war on us. There was slaughter and lamentation. Did not Thou, O Lord, feel the pain?"

This for Nanak was **Kaliyug**, the dark age when, 'true men speak the truth and suffer for it; when penitents cannot perform penance; when he who repeats God's Name meets obloquy.'

Life of Nanak

Let me end this talk with a brief account of the life of Nanak. He was born in April, 1469 (A.D.). His father was a revenue official in village Talwandi, about 40 miles from the city of Lahore, now in Pakistan. He was a Kshatrya of the Bedi subsect. Nanak was a precocious child. At the age of five he began to ask questions about the purpose of life. His schooling was conventional. He was taught the alphabet and numerals by a Hindu Pandit, and Arabic and Persian, by a Muslim Mulla. But he took little interest in his studies and began to spend

his time discoursing with itinerant fakeers or in solitude. He was married at the age of twelve and when he was nineteen, his wife came to live with him. They had two sons born to them. Soon after, the spiritual pursuit started again. For a time, he lived with his elder sister Nanki at Sultanpur, and worked as an accountant with the local Nawab. At Sultanpur, a Muslim ministrel, Mardana, joined him and the two began to organise community hymn singing — the hymns, being the compositions of Nanak set to music by Mardana. At Sultanpur, Nanak had a mystical experience which finally decided him to give up his job and undertake his mission to preach to the people. The incident is said to have taken place in the year 1499, when Nanak was in his 29th year. It has been dramatically described by his biographers. One morning, as was customary with him, he had gone to bathe in the waters of the Bein — a stream which ran near Sultanpur. He disappeared from view and was considered drowned. According to the biographers he was summoned to the presence of God and charged with the mission in the following words: "Nanak,, I am with thee. Through thee will my name be magnified ...... go in the world to pray and to teach mankind how to pray. Be not sullied the ways of world. Let your life be one of praise of the word (*Nām*), charity (*dān*), ablution (*ishnān*), service (*sevā*) and prayer (*simran*)". (Students of Islam will note the similarity between Nanak's first experience and that of the Prophet Mohamed in the cave of Mt. Hora).

Nanak is reported to have been missing for three days and nights. He reappeared on the fourth. The opening pronouncement of his mission was, "There is no Hindu; there is no Mussulman."

Nanak took to preaching. He finally abandoned worldly pursuits and undertook four long voyages. The first journey was to the east as far as Assam. He visited Hindu places of pilgrimage and met and discussed spiritual problems with ascetics and holymen. It was either on this journey (or the last one) that at Hardwar took place the famous incident of offering water to the dead. The pilgrims were throwing palmfuls to the rising Sun as an offering to their ancestors in heaven. Nanak began to throw it in the opposite direction. When questioned he answered simply — "If you can send water to your dead ancestors in heaven, I can certainly send it to my fields in the Punjab."

He stayed a short time at home and once again set out on another long tour. This time he went southwards through Tamilnad as far as Ceylon. On his return he spent a few years with his family in a new township he built and named KARTARPUR the abode of the Creator. The third journey was in the northern regions of the Himalayas. Nanak undertook the fourth and last of his long journeys in

1518. This time he went westwards to Mecca, Medina and as far as Basra and Baghdad. An incident which has become famous took place on this journey. Nanak unwittingly fell asleep with his feet pointing towards the Kaaba. An enraged mulla rudely woke him up and told him of the indignity he committed by having his feet towards the House of God. "Then turn my feet in some other direction where God does not exist" answered Nanak. (It is noteworthy that a similar incident is mentioned in the life of the Maratha Saint Namdev when he fell asleep with his feet resting on the Siva-linga).

When Nanak returned home, he was too old to undertake more strenuous journeys. His parents and his life-long companion, Mardana, died within one year. He decided to settle down at Kartarpur and instruct people who came to him. Large numbers of peasants — both Hindus and Muslims — flocked to hear him. Many became his disciples or **Shishyas** from which the Punjabi word Sikh is derived. The end came on the 22nd of September 1539 when Nanak was 69 years old. The legend goes that both the Hindus and the Muslims clamoured for his body: the former wanted to cremate him as Hindu, the latter to bury him as a Muslim. This posthumous compliment had been paid before to Kabir. It was also richly deserved by Nanak, who in the 46 odd years of travel and teaching had come to be loved both by Hindus and Muslims and was affectionately referred to as **"Guru Nanak Shah Fakir — Hindu Ka Guru, Mussulman Ka Pir.**

I would like to say a few words in explanation of the very short and somewhat soulless biographical account that I have given of Guru Nanak. Orthodox Sikh accounts refer to many miracles. I have deliberately omitted reference to them as the pattern of these miracles is much the same as those attributed to most eastern holy men and their source — the **Janam Sakhis** — is, as I have already stated, somewhat dubious. In any case Nanak himself denied all miraculous power and stated more than once that the only miracle he possessed was the name of God.

Guru Nanak's Personality

The picture of Nanak reconstructed from his own writings gives the impression of a highly sensitive man of great poetic ability. He was utterly impractical in his ways and consequently the despair of his hard-headed business-like father. He did not make a very satisfactory husband or father. He was, however, a man of great courage for it does take courage to defy convention, to be a non-conformist in a highly conformist society and face the ridicule of one's neighbours. His courage came from conviction that the people would

see his point of view if it was put to them gently without anger, sarcasm or ridicule. His greatest standby was his kindly sense of humour which he did not hesitate to turn against himself. Early in his career when people scoffed at his profession and considered him crazy, he wrote:—

"When I am quiet, they say I have no knowledge;
When I speak, I talk too much they say:
When I sit, they say an unwelcome guest has come to stay;
When I depart, I have deserted my family and run away.
When I bow, they say it is of fear that I pray.
Nothing can I do that in peace I may spend my time.
Preserve Thy servant's honour now and hereafter,
O Lord Sublime."

Nanak was a man of great humility. In his writings he constantly denigrates himself as ignorant, blind, low-born, **Neecha andar neecha jat neechee hoo ati neech.**

"Among the lowly, let my caste be the meanest,
Of the meanest, let me the lowest be;
O Nanak, let such be the men you know
With such men keep company.

Where the fallen have protected been,
Is God's grace and goodness seen".

The great strength of Nanak's teaching is due to his poetry. He was not a particularly learned man; Hindu scholars, notably Swami Dayanand, founder of the Arya Samaj, have accused him of being ignorant of the Vedas and Shastras. His appeal was however not that of cold logical analysis but of warm and passionate devotion — and that appeal he made in some of the most beautiful poetry written in the Punjabi language.

A good example is his *Bārā Māh*, the twele months, composed shortly before death. I will read three verses from this work:— The first two are to Spring :—

1. "It is spring. All is seemly,
The humming bumble bee
And the woodland in flower,
But there is a sorrow in my soul
For the Lord my Master is away.

If the husband come not home, how can a wife
Find peace of mind ?

Sorrows of separation waste away the body.
The Koil calls in the mango grove,
Its notes are full of joy
Why then the sorrow in my soul?

The bumble-bee hovers about the blossoming bough
O Mother of mine, it is like death to me
For there is a sorrow in my soul.

Nanak says : When the Lord her Master comes home to her
Then Spring is seemly for she is fulfilled."

2. "Beauteous Spring, when the bough adorns itself anew
The wife awaits the coming of her Lord
Her eyes fixed on the door.
My love, who alone can help me across
The turbulent waters of life, come.
Without Thee I am as worthless as a broken shell
When Thou look upon me with favour, love,
And our eyes mingle
Then shall I become priceless beyond compare."

Nanak says : Where seek Thou the Lord?
Who awaitest thou?
Thou hast not far to go to find Him.
He is within Thee, thou art His mansion.
If thy body and soul yearn for the Lord,
The Lord shall love thee
And Spring be beautiful.

3. The third is to **Savan**, the month when the monsoon is in full swing in the Punjab.

The season of rain has come.
My heart is full of joy.
My body and soul yearn for the Master
But my Master is in foreign lands.
If he return not, I shall die pining for Him.

The lightning strikes terror in my heart.
I am alone in my courtyard
In solitude and in sorrow.

O Mother of mine, I stand on the brink of death.
Without the Lord I have no hunger nor sleep
I cannot suffer the clothes on my body.
Nanak says: She alone is blest
Who becomes One with the Lord.

He was a poet to the last. As he lay on his deathbed at Kartarpur, scenes of his childhood came up before his eyes. In the last piece he wrote, he said "The tamarisk must now be in flower; the pampas grass must be waving its woolly head in the breeze and the cicadas calling in the lonely glades."

The following that Nanak created in forty years of teaching could not be described as a distinct community. It consisted of people who dissented from orthodox Hinduism and Islam without completely breaking away from them. But he had launched a movement against cant and humbug in religion which gathered momentum with the passage of years. The Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas described Nanak's achievements in the memorable lines: "**Mitti dhund Jag Chanan hoya**

The dust of confusion was lifted
The world was lit with wisdom.
As flees the herd of deer
Without pausing for breath
Without looking back
When a tiger roars
So fled the fog of delusion.

In my next lecture, I will deal with the salient points of Guru Nanak's religious philosophy.

GURU NANAK LECTURES–II

NANAK'S TEACHING

Your Excellency, Dr. Mahadevan, ladies & gentlemen,

In my last lecture I dealt with the spiritual inheritance of Sikhism, the times in which its founder, Guru Nanak lived, Guru Nanak's life, personality and standing as a poet of the Punjabi language. Today I will deal with the spiritual influences which moulded the Guru's thinking, his philosophy and his contribution to the realm of religious speculation.

I have already mentioned that we have no authoritative biography of Guru Nanak. The half-a-dozen or so **Janam Sakhis** — (life stories) that have been found vary in material detail and were in any case written at least 80 years after the Guru's death. Sikh scholars have begun to question their authenticity and look for other material. In the absence of contemporary account we are left with only one reliable source — the Guru's own writings. Fortunately for us the Guru's hymns were collected by Angad, who was a close companion of the founder for the last 25 years of his (i.e. Nanak's) life, and after Angad's own tenure as the second Guru of the Sikhs, passed on to the 3rd Guru Amar Das who in his turn passed them on to the fourth, Guru Ram Das. When the fifth Guru Arjun took upon himself the task of compiling the **Adi Granth**, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, he had little difficulty in obtaining Guru Nanak's compositions. He scrutinized over a thousand hymns, convinced himself of the genuineness and spiritual merits of 974 and formally incorporated them in the **Adi Granth** which he completed in 1604. It is these 974 hymns that we must examine to see what Guru Nanak did, believed and expounded as his philosophy of life.

Guru Nanak's hymns have very few references to incidents that took place in his life-time or to his travels. The invasion of Babar in 1526 is in fact the only historical event he mentions four or five times, He does not say anything about his visit to Assam, to Tamilnad and Ceylon, or to Mecca and Baghdad. Many scholars have, therefore, begun to doubt the authenticity of these odysses. The Guru does, however, mention names of some of the people he met and with whom he had discussions on spiritual problems. Besides these direct references we can deduce from his vocabulary, the dialect and the thought content — what influenced the Guru's mind.

Nanak, as I have already said was born a Kshatrya Hindu. Being a Bedi, it is legitimate to conclude that he studied the Vedas and other sacred Sanskrit texts. Even the most casual reading of his

hymns shows that he must have been greatly influenced by the **Rig Veda** and the **Upanishads** — notably the **Mandukya, Chandogya** and the **Kattha** — and to a lesser extent the **Bhagavad Gita.** As a young man he was undoubtedly exposed to the all-pervasive influence of the Bhakti cult — notably the songs of Bhakta Kabir. His travels in the Punjab brought him into contact with Muslim Sufis who were spread out all over the State. If I were to hazard a guess, I would say that the two men whose teaching influenced Nank most, were Bhakta Kabir and the Sufi, Shaikh Farid — both Muslims. In addition to these influences were negative reactions — his encounters with the followers of Guru Gorakh Nath who believed in **Hatha Yoga**. There might have been other influences as well. Nanak for instance refers to the Jain orders and uses Buddhist nomenclature. But I do not believe he had any prolonged or serious exposure to followers of either faith. In none of his hymns is there any reference to Christianity. This casts doubts on the traditionally accepted version of his travels. If he had (as is believed) travelled along the coasts of Southern India where at the time existed a flourishing Christian Church, it is hardly likely that Nanak with his acutely enquiring mind would have passed it by. If I may be allowed to use a simile to illustrate the influences of Nanak, I would say that in the goblet that Nanak drank out of many spirits were mingled: The base was Vedantic Hinduism. To this was added cupfuls of Bhakti and Sufism, thimblefuls of Jainism and Buddhism — and then seasoned with the **Hatha Yogi's** angostura bitters. It made a heady, spiritual cocktail. And Nanak drank copiously of it. As he said himself: "I am drunk with the Name of the Lord. the drunkenness leaves me not night nor day."

What then was the outcome of all these influences, exposures, confrontations and personal thinking?

Let me deal with the subject in an unconventional way. I believe that all religions deal with three relationships. First, man's relationship to his Maker. Where do we come from? Why? What is all this world about? Is there some power which guides our destinies? Why do good people often suffer in life and the evil prosper? What happens to us when we die? And so on. Speculations on the genesis of life, heaven and hell, **karma** and transmigration of the soul fall in this category.

The second relationship a religious system prescribes is man's relationship to man — his obligations as a member of the society in which he lives. The Commandments of the Hebraic family of religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — lay special emphasis on this aspect of religion: "Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife. And so on. Our codes of law complement this aspect of religion.

The third relationship dealt with by religious systems is man's relationship to himself — that is, to his conscience. The psychiatrist has begun to trespass upon this field of religion.

With Darwin making a hash of theories of the origin of life and scientists probing further into the mystery of death, with secular law regulating almost every aspect of a citizen's conduct in society and with the Freuds, Jungs, Adlers and the ever-increasing army of psychologists and psychiatrists probing further and further into the sub-concious and analysing conscience — even this domain no longer remains the monopoly of religion. The field of religion has shrunk to minimal proportions. The real test of the worth of any religious system is how much of what its founders said can stand up to these challenges of present day scientific, social and psychiatric advancement. If they do only then can they claim that their message is for all times. If they do not, they were transient phenomenon and today serve what Karl Marx rightly described as the opium of the people and will in due course be discarded. It is in the context of these challenges of modern times that I would wish you, ladies and gentlemen, to judge whether or not Guru Nanak's message will survive for ever as 'eternal truth'.

First then let me take man's relationship to his Maker. I will not deal in too great a detail with Nanak's version of the creation of the world and his concept of death because on both these he accepted current Hindu belief. His own hymn **arbad narbad dhundu kara** is a sort of Punjabi version of the Hymn of Creation of the Rig Veda. "Non-being then existed not nor being...... Desire then entered the one in the beginning, it was the earliest seed of thought the product ...... creative force was there and fertile power: Below was energy, above was impulse." Likewise Nanak accepted the theory of **Samsara** — of birth, death and rebirth. He used picturesque simile to describe this process — "Just as the pots of a Persian wheel go down, fill with water as they come up, empty and go down again", so is this life — a pastime of our Lord." **Jaisey harhat ki mala tind lagat hai ik sakhni hor bhareeat hai, taiso hee eh khel khasam ka...**" Let me quote from two other hymns where Nanak deals with the problem of life and death:

Jato jae kahan te avai

Know you whence comes life?
How we are born? Where go we when we die?
Why some are caught in the cycle of birth and rebirth
While others are freed to merge in the Deathless One?
Those who have Him in their hearts
And have His Name ever on their lips:
Those who worship Him but seek no gain

To them come birth and death peacefully.
Thoughts rise in the mind, in the mind do they subside;
Only the Guru's word gives us freedom
Contemplating upon it we achieve liberation.

Like birds at dusk settling on trees
To roost for the night
Some joyous, some sorrowing; all lost in themselves;
When dawns the day and gone is the night
They look up at the sky and resume their flight.

So does man fulfil his destiny.

paun pani agni ka mel

Air, water and fire
Of these elements is our body made
Within it is the restless agitation of the mind.
The body has nine doorways
The tenth is the one through which one goes to meet God.
O Learned one, have you that of this?

Every one can discourse, speak and listen.
Only he who knows himself understands the nature of the soul
And is a learned divine.

The body is made of clay
The sounds that emerge are of substance airy;
Know you, O learned one
What dies when a man dies?

Consciousness dies
Then dies the Ego
But the soul dies not.

What seek you in pilgrimage to sacred rivers?
The priceless jewel is within your breast.
The learned Pandit reads much, declaims much
But knows not the treasure within himself.

It is not I who die
But dies the demon of ignorance; he is destroyed.
The soul that sustains dies not.
Says Nanak, this is the Lord the Creator has shown me
Now I know there is no birth nor death.

According to Nanak God himself changed his own nature and function after the creation of the world — and God is Himself the author of duality and delusion. In the dawn hymns, the **Asa-di-Var** he

writes **apeenai ap sajio, apeenai racheo nau** — He himself created creation and gave currency to the Name — **Duyee Kudrat Saj Kai Kar Asan ditho chau** — and then assumed a second nature and with pleasure regarded his creation seated on His prayer mat." And it is God who having set the world and life in motion, threw in it as it were **moh thagauli** a pill thugs use to get their victims under the influence of the opiate before they rob them. "**Amal galola koor ka ditta devan har**: The Great Giver himself gave us the pill of falsehood. We forget death and for four short days indulge in pleasure. The temperate abstain, find truth and the court of God." Thus both good and evil emanate from God; man's role is to choose the one and avoid the other, to follow the ordinances of God (**Hukum Rajaee Chalna**) and earn His grace (**nadar**).

The opening lines of **Japji**, the Sikhs' morning prayer state Nanak's concept of God with utter clarity—

There is One God.
He is the supreme truth.
He, the Creator
Is without fear and without hate.
He, the Omnipresent
Pervades the universe.
He is not born,
Nor does He die to be born again.
By His grace shalt thou worship Him.

Before time itself
There was truth.
When time began to run its course
He was the truth.
Even now, He is the truth
And evermore shall truth prevail.

Nanak's God was One, Omnipotent and Omniscient. The concept of God being one was not ever has been unknown to Hinduism as if often wrongly assumed by those who denigrate it as a polytheistic and idolatrous creed. I quote an ancient South Indian folk song:

Into the bosom of the one Great Sea
Flow streams that come from hills on every side,
Their names are various as their springs
And thus in every land do men bow down
To one great God, though known by many names.

Nanak reaffirmed the Oneness of God with a passion reminiscent of Islam:

Ik doo jeebhau lakh hoe lakh hoe lakh vees

Were I given a hundred thousand tongues instead of one
And the hundred thousand multiplied twenty-fold,

A hundred thousand times would I say, and say again,
The Lord of all the world is One.
That is that path that leads
There the steps that mount,
Ascend thus to the Lord's mansion
And with Him be joined in unison.
The sound of the songs of Heaven thrills
The like of us who crawl, but desire to fly
O Nanak, His grace alone it is that fulfills,
The rest mere prattle, and a lie.

Nanak believed that God was **sat** (both truth and reality), as opposed to **asat** (falsehood) and **mithya** (illusion). He thus not only made God a spiritual concept but also based principles of social behaviour on that concept. If god is Truth, to speak an untruth is to be ungodly. Untruthful conduct not only hurts one's neighbours; it is also irreligious. A good Sikh therefore must not only believe that God is the only One, Omnipotent, and Omniscient Reality, but also conduct himself in such a way towards his fellow beings that he does not harm them: for hurtful conduct like lying, cheating, fornication, trespass on a person or on his property, does not conform to the truth that is God.

Nanak's God was ineffable — beyond description because he was **nirankar** — formless. The best one could do is to admit the inability to define Him.

Thou hast a million eyes, yet no eye hast Thou.
Thou hast a million forms, yet no form hast Thou.
Thou hast a million feet, yet no feet has Thou.
Thou art without odour, yet millions of odours
emanate from Thee.
With such charms, O Lord, has Thou bewitched me.
Thy light pervades everywhere.

But the fact that God cannot be defined should not inhibit us from learning about truth and reality. This we can do by treading the path of righteousness—

Sochai Soch na hovai

Not by thought alone
Can He be known,
Though one think
A hundred thousand times;
Not in a solemn silence
Nor in deep meditation
Though fasting yields an abundance of virtue

It cannot appease the hunger for truth
No, by none of these,
Nor by a hundred thousand other devices,
Can God be reached.
How then shall the Truth be known?
How the veil of false illusion torn?
O Nanak, thus runneth the writ divine,
The righteous path — let it be thine.

Thapea na jai keeta na hoe

He cannot be proved, for He is uncreated;
He is without matter, self-existent.
They that serve shall honoured be,
O Nanak, the Lord is most excellent.
Praise the Lord, hear them that do him praise,
In your hearts His name be graven,
Sorrows from your soul erase
And make your hearts a joyous haven.

God was the Father (**Pita**), the Lover (**Pritam**), the Master (**Khasam, Malik** or **Sahib)** the Great Giver (DATA) of all gifts. He was good God — but the evil that existed also emanated from Him : perhaps to purify us or to test our faith. He was **Rab, Rahim, Ram, Govinda, Murari** and **Hari.** Nanak, although he started by calling Him **Amukara** familar to readers of the Vedas and the Upanishads, began later to call Him **Sat Kartar** — the True Creator or **Sat Nam** — the True Name.

It will not be out of place to mention here that the Sikh word for God is **Wah guru.** We are not certain exactly when it came into vogue. It has been suggested that it was made up of a combination of names of Hindu gods — Vasudeva, Hari Govinda and Rama. There is little evidence for this theory. It started as an exclamation of praise "Hail guru". Exactly like the Muslim's **Subhan Allah** — Allah be praised. And later used to personify God. It is a remarkable coincidence that just as the suras of the Koran begin with **Bismillah-i-Rahman-i-Rahim** — in the name of Allah the Beneficient, the Merciful, so do the chapters of the Adi Granth with **EK ONKAR Satguruparshad**. The One God — By the grace of Guru, worship. There were other aspects of God that Guru Nanak took from the Vedas e.g., before creation God was **nirguna** (qualityless) and in a state of profound meditation (**Sunya Samadhi**). And after creating creation he became the repository of all qualities (**saguna**). Likewise the symbolic representation of God as the mystic syllable or sound **OM** (in the Mandukya and the Prasna Upanishads) as containing all that is past present and future — **Bhutam, Bhavad Bhavishyad iti sarvam aumkar evah** — is echoed in the Gurus **Dakhni Onkar** —

as the creator of Brahma, of conciousness, of time and space, of the Vedas, the emancipator, the essence of the three worlds." The whole concept of OM is somewhat elusive of understanding (it is utterly unknown to any other system of religion save those of the Hindu family) and I venture to suggest that it was soon crystallised in Sikh theology to the status of a symbol — the symbol for god — invariably to emphasise, His singular quality — **ik aumkar**, there is one God.

In equating God with the abstract principle of truth, Nanak avoided the difficulty met by other religious teachers who describe Him only as the Creator or the Father: if God created the world, who created God? If He is the Father, who was His father? But Nana's system had its own problems. If God is truth, what is the truth? Nanak's answer was that in situations when you cannot decide for yourself, let the guru be your guide.

Nanak made the institution of Guruship the pivot of his religious system. Without the guru as a guide, insisted Nanak, no one can attain **moksha** — release. The guru keeps you on the straight and narrow path of truth; he is the goad-stick which keeps man who is like a rogue elephant from running amok; he applies the salve of knowledge **gyan anjan** to your eyes so you can see the truth that is God; he is the divine ferryman who ferries us across the fearful ocean of life — the **bhava sagar**. The Guru or the **Satguru** — the true guru, was just a shade below God.

The guru's word has the sage's wisdom,
The guru's word is full of learning,
For though it be the guru's word
God Himself speaks therein.

Thus run the words of the guru:
"God is the destroyer, preserve and creator,
God is the Goddess too.
Words to describe are hard to find,
I would venture if I knew."

This alone my teacher taught,
There is but one Lord of all creation,
Forget Him not.

gur data gur hivai gur dipak teh loe

The guru is the giver:
The guru is the haven of peace
The peace that reigns on snow-clad mountains.
The guru is the lamp that lights the three worlds.
O Nanak, when he vouchsafes you the divine gift of faith

Then alone there is peace

But Nanak insisted on keeping God and the guru apart. The guru was to be consulted, respected, cherished but on no account to be worshipped. He was a teacher not a re-incarnation of God, not an avatar, nor a messiah. Nanak constantly referred to himself as the bard (**dhadi**) slave and servant of God.

Nanak describes the qualities one should look for in the guru. **So guru Karo je Sach dridavai** — take him as guru who shows the path of truth, **akath Kathavai sabad milavai** — who tells you of the One of whom nothing is known, who tells you of the divine word.

The guru was not only man's bridge to union with God but also his mentor about how to conduct himself towards his fellow men and his general pattern of living. This brings me to the second of the three relationships determined by religion viz., man's relationship to man.

Nanak strongly disapproved of asceticism, of penance and torturing of the flesh as a step towards enlightenment. "Be in the world but not worldly", he said over and over again. In one of his oft-quoted hymns, he said:

> Religion lieth not in the patched coat the yogi wears
> Not in the staff he bears,
> Nor in the ashes on his body.
> Religion leith not in rings in the ears
> Not in a shaven head,
> Nor in the blowing of the conch shell.
> If thou must the path of true religion see,
> Among the world's impurities, be of impurities free.

And again when questioned by a group of yogis how could a man attain release from worldly attachments, he said in his **Siddha Goshta :**

> The lotus in the water is not wet
> Nor the water-fowl in the stream.
> If a man would live, but by the world untouched,
> Meditate and repeat the name of the Lord Supreme.

Nanak no doubt abandoned his family when he first launched on his spiritual quest and often left it when he was away on his travels, but he always came back to it. He propagated the **grihastha dharma** — the religion of the householder. He advocated the company of holy men — **sadh sangat** — as an essential requisite of righteous living. And though he equated truth with God, he put righteous behaviour even above truth.

Sachon ore sabh ko
Upar Sach achar
Truth above all,
Above truth, truthful conduct.

It would follow logically that since Nanak believed in the society of righteous men, he could make no compromise with institution such as the caste system which not only vitiated the relationship between man and man but also ran counter to the Ordinances of God who was the embodiment of truth. Nanak denounced the caste-system in no uncertain words. He refused to grant audience to people unless they first broke bread in the community kitchen — **guru ka langar** — where the Brahmin and the untouchable, the Muslim and the Hindu sat alongside as equals. He was equally critical of concepts of purity and impurity that sprang out of notions of higher and lower categories of human beings. On the fetish of cooking squares he wrote :

Jekar Sootak manneeai, sub tey Sootak hoey :

Once we say: This is pure, this unclean,
See that in all things there is life unseen.
There are worms in wood and cowdung cakes,
There is life in the corn ground into bread.
There is life in the water which makes it green.
How then be clean when impurity is over the kitchen spread?

Impurity of the heart is greed,
Of tongue, untruth,
Impurity of the eye is coveting
Another's wealth, his wife, her comeliness.
Impurity of the ears is listening to calumny.

Lastly, we come to man's relationship to himself. Limited as we are in our knowledge about God, bewildered as we must be in the way men behave towards each other and faced as we are with the phenomenon of the triumphs of evil and evil men and the degradation of the good in an apparently godless world, how do we make peace with ourselves? What is it that we should strive for as our goal and how should we attain it?

Human birth, said Nanak, is a priceless gift. It is the opportunity that God gives us to escape the cycle of birth, death and re-birth. The aim of life should be **yoga** or union with God. Salvation lies in blending our light with the Light Eternal. The Gita advocated three alternative paths to salvation: that of action (**karmamarga**), of knowledge (**gyanamarga**), and of devotion (**bhaktimarga**). Guru Nanak accepted the path of bhakti, laying emphasis

on the worship of the Name (**namamarga**). "I have no miracles except the name of God", he said. In the **Japji**, he wrote—

bhareeai hath pair tan deh
pani dhotey utras kheh :

As hands or feet besmirched with slime,
Water washes white ;
As garments dark with grime,
Rinsed with soap are made light ;
So when sin soils the soul
The Name alone shall make it whole.

Words do not the saint or sinner make.
Action alone is written in the book of fate.
What we sow that alone we take ;
O Nanak, be saved or forever transmigrate.

Nanak believed that by repetition of the **nam** one conquered the greatest of all evils, the ego (**haumain** — literally, I am). So great did Nanak estimate the power of the ego, that he described those who conquered it as having attained salvation while still alive — they were **jeevan muktas.** Said Nanak, the ego carries in it the seed of salvation which can be nurtured to fulness by **nam.** Once the power of the ego is properly canalised the conquest of the other five sins — lust, anger, greed attachment and pride — follows as a matter of course. The wanderings of the restless mind are stilled and it attains a state of divine bliss (**vismad**). It is in that state of super-conscious stillness (**divya drishti**) that the tenth gate, the **dasam dvar** (the body having only nine natural orifices) is opened and one receives a vision of God and merges one's light with the Light Eternal. "**Nam japo** — worship the name of the Lord" was Nanak's constant exhortation. But this meant more than a parrot-like repetition of **Rama**, **Rama**, **Rama.** To Nanak **Nam** implied prayer plus understanding of the words of that prayer plus making them the rule of life. The path of Nama — **Nama Marga** requires three things; realisation of the truth within the heart (**hriday Gyan**), its expression in prayer (MUKH BHAKTI) and detachment from worldly things (**vartan vairag).** He believed that a man's real battle in life is fought with himself. **Mansa mar mano seo lujhai**—overcome the base desires and battle with the mind. "Use knowledge as a double-edged dagger", he said. "**Gyan Kharag lai man seo lujhai mansa manah samai** — then will base desires subside within the mind. For such a one who conquers himself the cycle of birth, death, and re-birth is ended and he attains salvation.

Nanak believed in the triumph of human will over fate and predestination. He believed that all human beings have a basic fund

of goodness which, like the pearl in the oyster, only awaits the opening of the shell to emerge and enrich him. But most human beings are as ignorant of the goodness in them as the deer is of the aromatic **kasturi** in its navel; and just as the deer wanders about in the woods to fall in the snares of poachers or becomes a victim of the hunter's darts, so man falls in the snares of MAYA (illusion). The chief task of the guru is to make men aware of the treasure within him and then help him to unlock the jewel box.

A method advocated by Nanak was the gentle one of **sahaj**. Just as a vegetable cooked on a gentle fire tastes best because its own juice gives it the proper flavour, so a gradual training of the body and mind will bring out the goodness that is inherent in all human beings. There is no general rule applicable to everyone; each person should discipline himself according to his physical capacity and temperament. Ascetic austerity, penances, celibacy, etc. had no place in Nanak's religion. In addition to self-imposed discipline of the mind, he advocated listening to **kirtan** (hymn singing). Nanak's verses were put to music in **ragas** or modes best suited to convey their meaning. He advised his followers to rise well before dawn and listen to the soft strains of music under the light of the stars. He believed that in the stillness of the ambrosial hours (**amritvela**) one was best able to have communion with God.

Guru Nanak believed in recitation of prayer and in **kirtan** to focus one's mind on God. He did not believe in pilgrimages and to this day there is no place of pilgrimage sanctified by the Sikh scriptures. He also did not believe in the profession of priesthood (as distinct from that of the guru or the teacher) and fortunately the class has not really been able to establish itself too strongly in the Sikh community.

Did Nanak have anything new to say? He certainly believed that he had. An incident in his life well illustrates it. He happened to be visiting the city of Multan famous for the large number of holymen, both Hindu and Muslim, who resided there. They were alarmed at the prospect of having a rival with as great a reputation as Nanak had coming to live amongst them and taking a share of their income. While the Guru was still encamped outside the city, they sent him a bowl of milk full to the brim — symbolising that Multan had its fill of goodness; there was no room for more. The Guru understood the gesture. He put the petal of jasmine flower on the milk and sent it back — a symbolic reply that just as a bowl of milk full to the brim had room for the fragrance of a flower, so did Multan, or for that matter the world itself, had and always will have, room for a new interpretation of faith.

No religious system is without a religious inheritance; it cannot be. And yet the very fact that it strikes out on its own is evidence

enough that it has a personality of its own. Sikhism owes a great deal to Vedantic Hinduism and Sufistic Islam. But it was in the judicious choice of what to accept and what to reject from the two traditions, the mingling of the accepted items of belief into a coherant system and impressing upon it the stamp of his own personality that Guru Nanak his singular contribution.

The legacy : There is some doubt on the point whether Nanak intended to form a third community, to simply reform Hinduism or bring the Hindus and Muslims together. It seems that earlier in his career his motives were largely to bring the two communities closer to each other. Being himself a Hindu this necessarily involved greater emphasis on reforming Hinduism. But as years went on and his message caught on amongst the people of the Punjab, a large number of people of both faiths were willing to subscribe to his teaching and describe themselves as his **Shishyas,** Sikhs or disciples — without abandoning their original creeds of Islam or Hinduism. This state allowed people to relapse into their old ways and he probably decided to give his work some permanency through a sect of his own. But there can be no doubt that if Nanak did encourage the founding of a third community, he intended it to become a bridge to connect two sides divided by a gulf of misunderstanding, to forge a chain which would bind the two in bonds of eternal friendship.

GURU NANAK LECTURES—III

From the Pacifist Sikh to the Militant Khalsa

Your Excellency, Dr. Mahadevan, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my first Lecture I dealt with the historical background of the birth of Sikhism and the life of the founder, Guru Nanak. I concluded my second lecture by saying that although we are not certain whether Guru Nanak intended only to reform Hinduism, to bring the Hindus and Muslims together or to start a third and independent religion, the impact of his personality was such that there grew a community of people both Hindu and Muslim who described themselves as his disciples (**shishyas**) from which the word Sikh is derived. Whatever the intentions of the founder — and I believe that there were elements of all the three alternatives in those intentions viz., to reform Hinduism, to bring the Hindus and Muslims together and to start a new religion which could exemplify such a fusion of faiths — the seeds for the birth of a new and separate community had been sown in good and fertile soil. It was left to Guru Nanak's nine successors to water the sapling, to guard it against political storm and strife, to nurture it and give it form till it became a sturdy tree.

We Sikhs believe that the spirit of the founder of our faith passed from one Guru to the next "as one lamp lights another." We believe that the religion of Guru Nanak remained in essence unaltered; only external symoblism changed. This may not be obvious to non-Sikhs who find it hard to reconcile Guru Nanak's religion of goodwill towards all and worship of the Name of God without any ritual, temple, priest or place of pilgrimage with the aggressive, bearded, beturbaned, sword-bearing Khalsa Singhs with a rigid code of martial conduct. I will endeavour to explain this paradox as best as I can to-day.

Guru Nanak had founded the town of Kartarpur and built a **dharmasala** where his disciples were went to congregate and chant the many beautiful hymns composed by him. This congregational worship was formalised by his successor, the second Guru, Angad who used the Gurmukhi script to compile a hymnal. Apparently Angad also tried to collect information on the earlier life and travels of Nanak, and put the **guru-ka-langar** the Guru's kitchen — to feed the disciples who came to the **dharmsala** on a regular footing. To use Muslim terminology, in the writings of Nanak, the Sikhs got their **Koran**, in the pattern of Nanak's life, their **Hadith** and in the **dharmsala** at Kartarpur their first Mecca. Thus began the drift away

from the parent communities, the Hindus from whom the majority of disciples were drawn, and the Muslims. The process was carried a step further by the third Guru, Amar Das, who organised the Sikhs into 22 **manjis** or bishoprics for the purpose of collecting a tax the **dasvandh** — the tenth — to defray the expenses of the Guru's establishment and the communal welfare. He also built another **dharmsala at Goindwal**. The fourth Guru, Ram Das, carried the process still further. He bought 700 bighas of land from the Emperor Akbar and set up a new town — first known as **Ram Das Pur** or **Chak Ramdas** and had a large tank dug which he blessed. It came to be known as Amritsar — the pool of immortality. Amritsar was a significant choice. It was in the heart of the country populated by sturdy Hindu peasantry who had begun to join the Sikh movement in large numbers. And Amritsar soon developed into the most important trading centre of the Punjab where goods from distant Bokhara, Kabul and Kashmir were exchanged for products of eastern and Southern India. Guru Ram Das was held in great esteem by Emperor Akbar. This not only helped him materially in building temples and towns but also in assuming the leadership of the Hindus of the Punjab. The most important innovation of Guru Ram Das which gave a sort of continuity to guruship was in making the office hereditary inasmuch as thereafter it remained in one family of the Sodhis. This not only gave a sense of expectancy to the community but also a sort of sanctity to the family.

With the fifth Guru Arjan, the Sikhs were launched on their own and freed of the tutelage of the parent communities the Hindus and the Muslims. Guru Arjan did many things to bring this about. Most important of all he compiled the **Adi Granth.** He got the writings of the first four Gurus, collected the works of Hindu and Muslim saints from all over northern India, added his own compositions and installed it as the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. This step had most important consequences. The Sikhs stopped looking to the Hindu or Muslim scriptures for inspiration. In any case since they understood neither Arabic nor Sanskrit and the gurus hymns were couched in a language intelligible to them, they turned to them with alacrity. Besides, Arjun was most judicious in his choice and took only the very best of the compositions of the saints of northern India. The poetic excellence the spiritual content and the haunting, lilting melody of the hymns of the **Adi Granth** remain to this day Sikhisms' greatest draw for those who understand the Punjabi language. Guru Arjan also gave Amritsar a permanent place in Sikh religious geography. He had the Muslim divine, Main Meer of Lahore to lay the foundation stone of a new temple on the site of the old built in the middle of the tank by his father. This was not just another Sikh **dharamsala** but the **Hari-mandir;** the temple of

God the Sikh counterpart of the Haridwar or Benaras of the Hindus or Mecca of the Mussalmans. Arjun built another temple at Taran Taran, a few miles from the city to cater for the peasantry which had by now turned Sikh. These two temples, according to Dr. Gokal Chand Narang author of "Transformation of Sikhism", became the beacons radiating "light that made the peasantry realise its strength and transformed it from peaceful and toiling husbandmen into fiery soldiers."

Guru Arjan was fully conscious of the new role he was planning for his community. In a passage he mentions the separate identity the Sikhs had acquired in a hundred years of their existence :

> I do not keep the Hindu fast, nor the Muslim Ramadan.
> I serve Him alone who is my refuge.
> I serve the one Master, who is also Allah.
> I have broken with the Hindu and the Muslim,
> I will not worship with the Hindu, nor like the Muslim go to Mecca,
> I shall serve Him and no other.
> I will not pray to idols nor heed the Muslim's **azan**
> I shall put my heart at the feet of the one Supreme Being,
> For we are neither Hindus nor Mussulmans.

Guru Arjan was Sikhism's St. Paul, the real builder of the Sikh Church. He organised a revenue system and appointed **masands** tax collectors. He tapped other sources of income. He sent his followers across the North-West Frontier to Afghanistan, Persia and Turkey to trade; to sell the silks and spices of India and buy horses in exchange. These ventures across regions inhabited by savage tribesmen taught them daring, brought them money and above all set up a tradition of good horsemanship amongst the Sikhs. Although a devoutly religious man, his varied activities to promote the well-being of his following made Arjan a merchant-prince of national importance.

It will be apparent from all this that the status of the guru had undergone a radical change. The guru was no longer a recluse devoting himself exclusively to prayer and preaching. He had come to wield secular power. He held court and received emissaries from rulers of States. He had become a **Sacha Padshah**, the true emperor of the nebulous kingdom of the Sikhs. Even the Mughal Emperor Jehangir's son, Prince Khusro, who had revolted against his father, came to the Guru for help — both material and spiritual. It is remarkable that with all this power, Guru Arjan retained a profound sense of humility. It is said that when he went to pay his respect to Sri Chand, the son of Guru Nanak, Sri Chand asked him, "why

do you let your beard grow so long?" Guru Arjan replied: "To wipe the dust of your feet."

Arjan's humility was only one aspect of his protean personality. He was a remarkably gifted poet. Almost half the **Adi Granth** consists of his compositions. And what beautiful religious poetry it is! Let me just read three of his hymns that I have translated;

(1) *Jā ko muskul ati ban ai dhoī koī nā deī*

When troubles come and you have no one to turn to
When enemies are at your heels and your kinsmen desert you
When all hope is fled, all hope shattered
Let your thoughts turn to Him who is your Maker
And no ill-wind will harm you.

The Master is the strength of the feeble.
He does not come and go, He is forever where He is.
The guru's words shall reveal the truth to you.
When you are weak and frail,
Without clothes, without food,
When no one drops a coin in your apron
Nor gives you comfort.
When no one helps you and you succeed not in your actions
Let your thoughts turn to Him who is your Maker
And your affairs will go well forever.

When cares crowd upon you
When your body is foul with disease
When you are obsessed with thoughts of your wife and kinsmen
And sometimes happy and sometimes sad,
When restless and agitated your mind wanders in all directions
Without a moment's rest, without a moment's sleep.
Let your thoughts turn to Him who is your Maker,
And your body and mind will forever be whole.

When lust, anger, and attachment hold you captive
And full of greed you are ever wanting, covetous,
When you have committed the four sins
(Drunk wine, thieved, fornicated, and murdered)
And in the company of devils have become a devil,
When neither books of wisdom nor songs nor hymns of praise
Fall upon your ears
Let your thoughts turn to Him who is your Maker
And in the twinkling of an eye will you be saved.

Books of wisdom you might know by heart, and recite
Pray and practice penances of Yogis, all pilgrimages undertake

And twice perform the six good acts
(Learn and impart learning to others,
Sacrifice and make others give in sacrifice
Give alms and accept charity),
Bathe in holy water and do worship.
If you love not the Lord with all your being,
It is all in vain and for you there is nothing but hell.

Empires, kingdoms, and baronies may be yours
And the wherewithal of power and pleasure.
You may own orchards, beautiful and bountiful,
And have power over others without any limit
And indulging in sports and pastimes to keep yourself amused.
If your thoughts turn not to Him who is your Maker (and repent)
In your second birth you will be reborn a serpent.

You may have much wealth,
Live well and have gentle ways
Love deeply your mother and father, sons, brothers and friends,
Own armies of footmen and archers, and many to bow to you in salvation.
Many to shout "Long may you live,"
If your thoughts turn not to Him who is your Maker
You shall surely be dragged down to hell.

Your body may be free of fever and without sores,
Your mind free of cares and affliction.
Without ever the thought of death
Night and day you may enjoy yourself
And take everything as your own
Without any reserve or hesitation.
If your thoughts turn not to Him who is your Maker
For you will be the servitude of hell's demon.

Those to whom the Creator is merciful
Are given the company of holy men,
The more they are with such companions.
The more they love the Lord.
He is the Lord of good and evil
There is none other than Him.

O Nanak, only by His Grace will you find,
The True Guru, whose Name is Truth.

(2) *Śubh chiṅtan gobiṅd raman, nirmal sādhū saṅg*

O Lord, grant me these: purity of thought,
Will to worship, company of godly men,
And the power never to forget You for even a moment.

The night is damp with drops of dew
Stars twinkle in the sky.
Those beloved of the Lord are risen
For those whom the Lord loves are ever awake.
Night and day His Name is on their lips
In their hearts rest His lotus feet
Their thoughts never stray from Him.

Abandon pride and lust, they silt the mind
And smother them in the smoke of sorrow.
Nanak says, Those that love the Lord never slumber

(3) *umkīo hio milan prabh tāīṉ*

My heart leaped up to behold the Lord
I heard of His coming, in my heart I made His cot,
I went out to meet my Beloved
I wandered everywhere but saw Him not.
O poor heart, how wilt thou get peace of mind?
I will give my life if the Lord I find.

One cot is spread for the Lord and wife.
She slumbers, Her Lord awaits ever awake
But like one drunk she sleeps.
If the Lord embrace her, she too will wake.

I am without hope, many days have passed
In many lands and continents did I seek Him.
I cannot live if I clasp not His blessed feet
If He be kind, my fortune will turn and we shall meet.

He was good and gave me the company of the true
And my restless wanderings did then cease.
In my house I found my Lord
All my adornments now do Him please.

Says Nanak: The Guru has lifted illusion's veil.
Whichever way I turn, O brother, I see my Lord
The doors of ignorance are thrown asunder
The restless mind has ceased to wander.

These are by no means isolated examples of guru Arjan's poetic skill. It is in the SUKHMANI the psalm of peace, that we sense his mastry of the bejewelled phrase and the power to infuse music into words. Some day, I hope, some poet will try his band at translating this masterpiece of religious poetry.

The greatest contribution Guru Arjan made to his community was to die for it. The circumstances which led to his imprisonment,

torture and death at Lahore are a little confused. He had undoubtedly angered Emperor Jehangir by the blessing he had given to Prince Khusro's rebellion. Jehangir had wreaked savage vengeance on those who had participated in the venture. The Guru's support to Khusro was, however, not such as to merit dire punishment. But the Guru had apparently also offended Chandu Shah a Hindu nobleman who had influence in the Mughal court. He had refused to accept Chandu Shah's daughter as wife for his son Hargobind. The Guru was arrested and after being severely burnt on hot sands allowed to drown in the river Ravi. His manly and dignified behaviour throughout the presecution touched the hearts of millions of people. His martyrdom had two serious consequences. The Sikhs not only parted ways from the Muslims but also became antogonistic towards them. Arjan's passing also ended the pacifist phase of Sikhism. Guru Nanak's faith of turning the other cheek to the aggressor was replaced by the belief that when peaceful means fail, it is a religious duty to retaliate. The peaceful Sikhs of Nanak began to change into armed crusaders — determined to avenge the death of their guru and destroy the tyrannous empire of the Mughals.

Before his incarceration and death, Arjan nominated his son Hargobind as the sixth Guru and girded him with two swords symbolising spiritual and temporal power: "Let him sit upon the throne and maintain an army to the best of his ability," was the order.

Guru Hargobind was temperamentally inclined to the role his father had outlined for him. He was fond of hunting and martial exercises. He abandoned the vegetarianism of his predecessors and enjoined his followers to eat meat and build their physique. He maintained a cavalry of 800 horsemen and a bodyguard of 300 stalwart Sikhs. He was in and out of favour with Jehangir and had to spend some years as a prisoner in the fort of Gwalior. This new temporal role of the guru was not well received by all disciples some of whom complained that he was "too much Mohammadans and military exercises". The role, however, had come to stay. On his release he raised an army and became an important military leader in the Punjab. He fought three engagements with Mughals and won all of them. It must however be borne in mind that there was nothing anti-Muslim about Hargobind's outlook or military ventures. His chief lieutenant was a Pathan, Painda Khan; his closest friend, the famous Muslim divine, Main Meer.

You will notice how the Sikhs' first reaction to violence was violence. With the next two guru's Har Rai and Hari Kishan, there was peace between the authorities and the Sikhs. Emperor Aurangzeb was still not firmly in the saddle to take action against Har Rai who had espoused the cause of his brother Dara Shikoh. When Aurangzeb secured the throne he summoned the infant Hari Kishan to Delhi.

Hari Kishan escaped the Emperor's vindictiveness by falling a victim to small-pox. Aurangzeb's wrath had to fall on the successor — the 9th Guru, Tegh Bahadur. And it fell upon a man who had the makings of martyr — a quiet man of devout and ascetic habits; a man loved and looked upon by the mass of Hindus as their leader. He emerged from the seclusion of a hermit's life to assume guruship. When the Hindus asked him to face Aurangzeb as their nominee, he did so with complete disregard to the fate which he knew awaited him. He came to Delhi and was promptly put in prison. He was offered his life if he abjured his faith and on his refusal to do so was beheaded. The manner in which he faced death is indeed one of the great classics of courage. It is said that he was asked to perform a miracle. He wrote some words on a piece of paper and strung it round his neck saying that it would be a charm against death. After his execution the paper was opened. It read: "*Sīs diyā par sirr nā diyā*"—I gave my head but not my faith.

Before I go on to the aftermath of Guru Tegh Bahadur's execution, I'd like to read to you two of this hymns inserted in the *Ādi Granth* by his son — for Tegh Bahadur like many of the earlier gurus was a gifted poet.

(1) *birthā kahoū kaun sioṉ mankī*

Whom shall I tell of the anguish of my heart?
Greed has me in its hold.
I rush madly in the ten directions
Seeking gold.
I suffer much wanting life of ease
And serve all kinds of people,
And like a dog go from door to door
But I have no thought of prayer.
I waste my human existence,
I have no shame when people laugh at me.
O Nanak, why sing you not in praise of the Lord
And rid your mind and body of impure thoughts?

(2) *jo nar dukh mai dukh nahī manai*

He who in adversity grieves not,
He who is without fear;
He who falls not in the snare of sensuality,
Who has no greed for gold knowing it is like dust.
He who does not slander people when their backs are turned,
Nor flatters them to their faces.
He who has neither gluttony in his heart.
Nor vanity nor attachment with worldly things.
He whom nothing moves,

Neither good fortune nor ill,
Who cares not for the world's applause,
Nor its censure,
Who ignores every wishful fantasy
And accepts what comes his way as it comes.
He whom lust cannot lure
Nor anger command,
In such a one lives God Himself,
On such a man does the guru's Grace descend.
For he knows the righteous path.
O Nanak, his soul mingles with the Lord
As water mingles with water.

Most of Guru Tegh Bahadur's verses are in the later part of the Granth Sahib — full of melancholic music and pathos.

Exactly as the execution of Arjan had resulted in his son Hargobind taking to arms, so did the martyrdom of Tegh Bahadur result in his son Gobind unsheathing the sword — this time almost irrevocably because the period that followed was more turbulent than the Punjab had even known before.

I shall now deal with the events in Guru Gobind's life which moulded not only his personality but also that his Sikh followers and which in the words of Dr. Narang changed the emphasis of the faith of Nanak from 'devotion and piety to pugnacity and valour'.

Gobind was a boy of nine or ten when his father was executed in Delhi — but he was a boy with a brain and mind beyond his years. He realised that he was not strong enough to measure swords with the Mughals — at the time at the zenith of their power. He left the plain of the Punjab and retired to the mountain fortresses of the Himalayas to contemplate in peace and to prepare for his mission in comparative safety.

Although the Mughal empire of Aurangzeb had a strong facade, the canker of decay had begun to eat into its despotic vitals. The bigotry of the ruling class had antogonised a large section of the Hindus. The Marathas had risen under their intrepid leader, Shivaji. The chronically divided clans of Rajputs were becoming aware of the causes of their weakness. In the Deccan, Muslim kingdoms were at logger-heads. The only part of India firmly under the heel of the Mughals was the Punjab. In addition, the population of the Punjab was predominantly Muslim and despite its disapproval of the narrow anti-Hindu policy of the ruling class, was not likely to sanction any non-Muslim rebellion against an Islamic State. So the odds against Guru Gobind were very much heavier than those against the Marathas or the Rajputs. Above all, being a religious leader Guru Gobind

had to maintain standards of integrity in personal and political dealings which Shivaji did not have to, nor bothered to maintain.

The Guru spent many years in this hills — according to some historians as many as twenty. He taught himself Sanskrit and Persian and maintained 52 bards in his court. In their company he learnt to write poetry in Brajbhasha, Punjabi and Persian. And like his predecessors, a very gifted poet he turned out to be. He began to train his followers in the use of arms and built a chain of fortresses in the Shivalik Hills at Paunta, Chamkaur, Anandpur etc. He actually announced his mission on the 1st of Vaisakh 1699 in a most dramatic manner. He had spent many days in seclusion meditating — it is said by some historians, in the temple of the Goddess Chandi. Then he assembled his followers and sword in hand asked for five men to give their lives as sacrifice before launching his crusade. Five men did turn up, were taken into a tent and instead of them the Guru slaughtered five goats. The 'Five' known as the 'beloved ones' became the first members of the new fraternity the 'Khalsa' — from the Persian *Khālis* meaning pure. Thereafter thousands of others accepted baptism or **pahul**. They broke their ties with their previous kin, community, faith, occupation — **Kritnash, Kulnash**, **Dharamnash**, **Karamnash** and swore to dedicate themselves to the new mission.

Five emblems were prescribed for the Khalsa. They were to wear their hair and beard unshorn (**kes**); they were to carry a comb (*Kaṉghā*) in the hair to keep it tidy; they were always to wear a knee-length pair of breeches (**kach**), worn by soldiers of the times; they were to carry a steel bracelet (*Kaṛā*) on their right wrist; and they were to be ever armed with a sabre (*Kirpān*). In addition to these five emblems, the converts were to observe four rules of conduct (**rahat**); not to cut any hair on any part of their body (this was a repetition of the oath regarding the **kes**); not to smoke, chew tobacco or consume alcoholic drinks; not to eat an animal which had been slaughtered by being bled to death, as was customary with the Muslims, but only *jhaṭkā* meat, where the animal had been despatched with one blow; and not to molest the person of Muslim women.

At the end of the oath-taking the Guru hailed the converts with a new form of greeting:

Vah guru jī kā khālsā
Vah guru jī kī fateh
The Khalsa are the chosen of God
Victory be to our God.

Guru Gobind Singh is said to have explained these innovations in a lengthy address to the assemblage: "I wish you all to embrace

one creed and follow one path, obliterating all differences of religion. Let the four Hindu castes, who have different rules laid down for them in the **Shastras** abandon them altogether and, adopting the way of cooperation, mix freely with one another. Let no one deem himself superior to another. Do not follow the old scriptures. Let none pay heed to the Ganges and other places of pilgrimage which are considered holy in the Hindu religion, or adore the Hindu deities, such as Rama, Krishna, Brahma, and Durga, but all should believe in Guru Nanak and his successors. Let men of the four castes receive baptism, eat out of the same vessel, and feel no disgust or contempt for one another."

One may well ask did Guru Gobind Singh mean to change the faith of Nanak? Yes, and no. In its essential beliefs Gobind introduced no change. His Sikhism was that of Nanak, believing in the one One Supreme Creator who was without form or substance and beyond human comprehension. He condemned the worship of idols. He gave the institution of guruship a permanent and abiding character by vesting it in the immortality of the Granth and in the continuity of the Khalsa Panth. Being the author of so many traditions, he was particularly conscious of the danger of his followers imposing divinity on him.

For though my thoughts were lost in prayer
At the feet of Almighty God,
I was ordained to establish a sect and lay down its rules.
But whosoever regards me as Lord
Shall be damned and destroyed.
I am — and of this let there be no doubt —
I am but the slave of God. as other men are,
A beholder of the wonders of creation.

Like Nanak, Gobind Singh believed that the sovereign remedy for the ills of mankind was *nām* — a life of prayer. He did not alter the form of prayer — the **Adi Granth** remained the scripture; his own works were never accorded the same sanctity. He disapproved of asceticism and ridiculed the caste system. His motto was: *manas kī jāt sab ek hī phchānbo* — know all mankind as one caste. Like Nanak, he believed that the end of life's journey was the merging of the individual in God:

As sparks flying out of a flame
Fall back on the fire from which they rise;
As dust rising from the earth
Falls back upon the same earth;
As waves beating upon the shingle
Recede and in the ocean mingle
So from God come all things under the sun
And to God return when their race is run.

The only change Gobind brought in religion was to expose the other side of the medal. Whereas Nanak had propagated goodness, Gobind Singh condemned evil. One preached the love of one's neighbour, the other the punishment of transgressors. Nanak's God loved His saints; Gobind's God destroyed His enemies.

We need not go in detail on the career of the Guru as a military leader. His first trial of strength against the hill rajas were successful. But struggle against the Mughals was always a losing battle. He lost all his four sons — the elder two died fighting, the two younger ones were executed by being buried alive (they were aged 9 and 10). Despite these reverses his spirit never failed him. When the Emperor Aurangzeb asked him to give up the unequal battle and come to terms, he wrote back a most defiant reply in his **Zafarnamah,** the epistle of victory — "What use is it to put out a few sparks when you raise a mighty flame instead?

The Guru died in 1708 at Nander in Hyderabad Deccan at the hands of two Muslims who were hired assasins. Before his death he announced that the line of Gurus was at an end and thereafter the Sikhs were to regard the **Adi Granth** — compiled by the fifth Guru Arjan in which Guru Gobind had incorporated the hymns written by his father Tegh Bahadur — to be the living symbol of the ten gurus.

And so the great saga of Sikhism, begun about the year 1500 when Nanak proclaimed his mission, came to a close a little over 200 years later. Its three great characters Nanak, Arjan and Gobind could be likened into the three gods of the Hindu trinity — Nanak like Brahma was the Creator, Arjan like Vishnu was the Preserver, and Guru Gobind like Siva was the destroyer of the enemies of the Sikhs.

I do not know if I have in these three lectures been able to put across the salient features of the religion propagated by Nanak and his nine successors. There is something fatuous about religion's other than ones own. What is emotionally satisfying to a believer may appear quaint and even amusing to another. Let me end with the words of an Islamic scholar: "Water when analysed consists of two elements without taste and flavour, still it quenches the thirst and is the substance of life. Likewise every religion can be analysed into elements of myth, legends and popular lore, still it quenches the thirst of man for guidance and truth and sustains him in his stumbling progress through errors and deficiencies in his slow approach to the harmony pervading the universe."